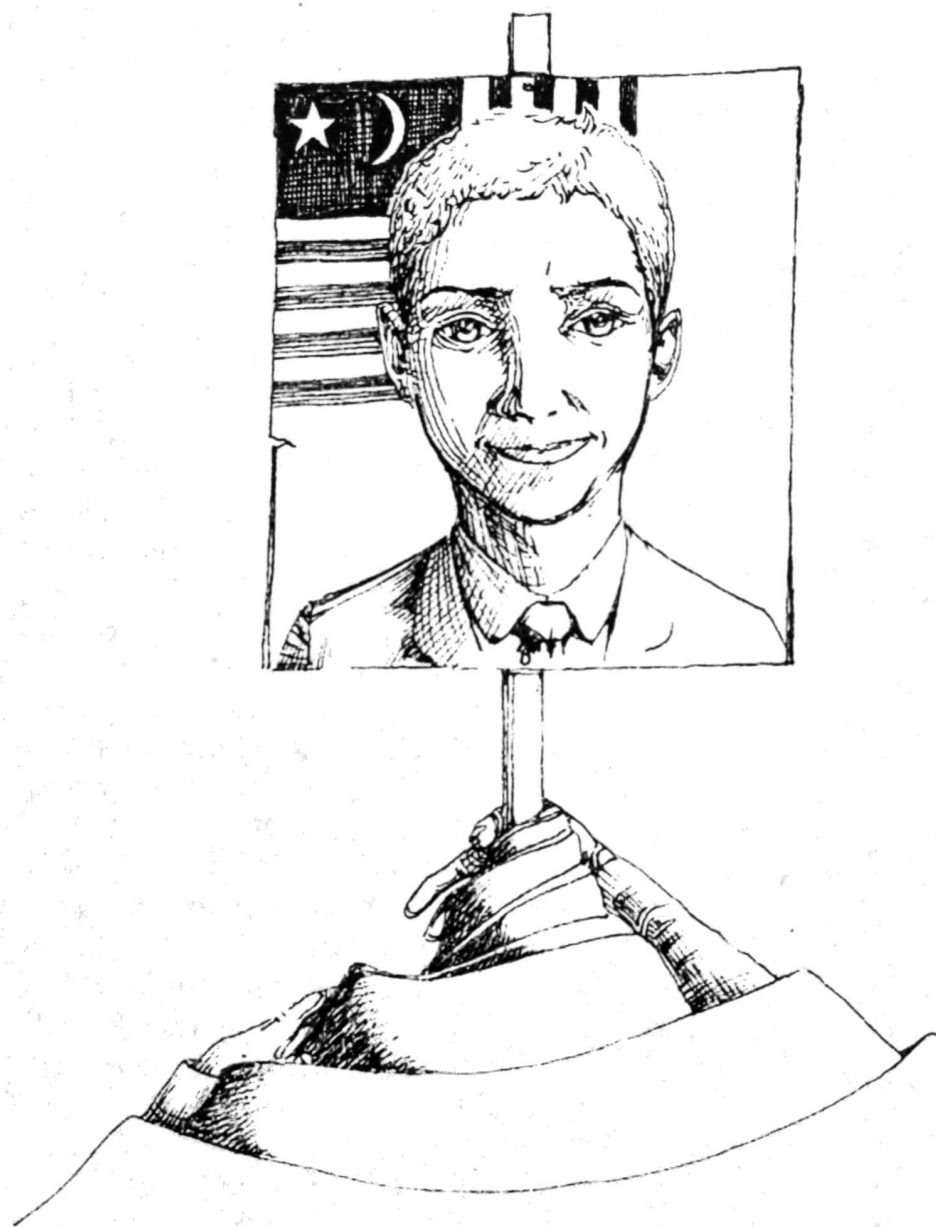


勇敢的機器人



All points of view, foreign or domestic, expressed or inferred, contained herein, are purely for the purposes of mind/soul massage and exploration. Any damage to ego or identity is, therefore, purely self-inflicted and possibly the fault of the entertainment you intake and/or your parents. I would like to extend to you a very large thank you, gentle soul, for bringing your energy to these pieces of paper. If you have fallen in love (or like) with any particular piece of writing, and want to copy or republish, or contact said piece's author, please email - deanhaakenson@gmail.com - If you would like to submit something, anything (drawings, text, rubbings), please email. If you would like to email, please email. If you would like to please, please please. If you would like to post or find out about quality Sacramento area musical performances, go to <http://undietacos.sexyprison.com>. "be brave bold robot" phrase lovingly stolen from the sexily vandalized women's bathroom stalls at Humboldt University in Arcata, California and located on the world wide web at www.bebraveboldrobot.org. chew thoroughly, floss regularly, breath deeply, and Sing heartily.

Sacramento Open mics

MON

The Blue Lamp (Alhambra & N) *20:30

The Fox and Goose (10th and R) *19:30

TUE

It's A Grind Coffee Shop *19:00

Sunrise & Cirby, NW Corner, Roseville

G Street Pub, 228 G St., Davis *20:30

WED

Old Ironsides (10th & S) *20:00

FRI

Cosmic Café, 530.642.8481

594 Main St., Placerville, *19:00

SUN

Java Café & Brew *19:00

(Fair Oaks and Madison...in the suburbs)

precious priceless gold

never before have i seen

a cup of tea manicured

as gently as now...

scruffy bartender in the smoky dive bar

poured the honey

as if it were precious priceless gold.

Northern Hemisphere Faction of the **Defenders** of the **Purity of Night (DOTPON)**, CRUST division:

Akie-Chan, Eric Bourne, Erica Bready, Dean

Haakenson, Darte Hunt, Brian James, Maudia

Marie, Scott Moore, Hans Rickheit, Stefan Wenk.

The Defenders of the Purity of Night (DOTPON)

(started by a relative of the beloved **Bernardine**

Dohrn of the revolutionaries' club the Weather

Underground...without her knowledge...so,

shush!) is **a** privately funded, intricately organized

group of youthful **spirits** **who** act as modern day

Robin Hoods. They secretly **remove** things (that

may or **may** not belong to any particular **someone**)

from places **where** they **are** not being used, to

places where they will be used. In essence, they

facilitate **communism**. Ever woke up **one** **day** to

find that the **rusted** over dumbbells that you had

left outside **all** **winter** are now missing? **That** was

probably the DOTPON. Those dumbbells are

probably now **being** used by someone who has

taken up shelter at one of the DOTPON's

randomly located "Houses of the Holy" (equipped

with **fitness** center and fully stocked cafeteria).

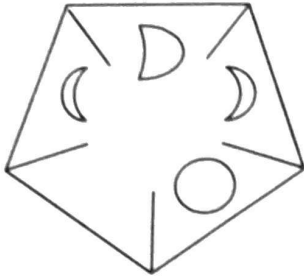
Many of our **residents**/ad hoc commune

inhabitants, were once homeless or **impoverished**,

but you need not be as such to join the rank-less.

You are **invited**...by **everyone**.

Be Brave Bold Robot issue # 12, 2005 Autumnal.



Don't
Let
Gender
Phase
You

*"If God had intended it
otherwise, God would not
have created Five Genders."*
- The Great Fullness

The words keep running through my head as if they're trying to find a way out,

*"You stand as if you're trying to be someone
You drive as if you're trying to get somewhere
You talk as if you're trying to say something
You dream as if you're trying to breathe some air"*

Although I haven't turned a radio on in three weeks it's as if I just heard the song. It's not even my favorite, in fact I'm not even sure I like it anymore considering all the trouble I got myself into, living the lyrics as if they were some kind of philosophical *raison d'être*. But I guess I'm not making much sense so I'll start at the beginning and if you'll try to keep up maybe we can get this whole thing sorted out.

New

I guess the logical place to begin would be my birthday. My first birthday of course, since that's what matters. I was born on the eleventh so that would make me a Halfsie, which is neither here nor there if you know what I mean. Spending my first twelve years in leather shorts and lace shirties was never my idea of glamorous fashion, let alone functional fashion for that matter, and especially with one older Fullsie and a younger Newsie in the house it only drove the point even more home, that I was only ever going to sit on the bench, watch the water bucket and not even get to tackle anyone who came near it. Or even take a drink out of it for that matter. By the time my twelfth birthday rolled around I was definitely not looking forward to my aestheticision, and I was damn near ready to do anything to avoid it, even switch. I guess I just never really understood how what I did would affect so many, by so much, for so long. But I'm getting ahead of myself again.

I think I was always a little precocious for my age. For instance there's that time when I was 3 and I was caught putting on Rutga's makeup. How was I to know red wasn't my color. Fact is, and I could never really say this till now, I knew darn well red was not my color or at least that everyone intended for it not to be my color. The fact that Rutga used it on a daily basis, and sure Rutga was older than me but not by much, and so did our Potter, that was reason enough for me to claim my own identity as a Full-z, even if it wasn't up to me. Even though at the time I didn't even know the name of the game, I knew it was being played and that it looked like I was going to be a spectator. Some game I thought, Gender.

I guess it wasn't long after that that I must have shown an inordinate amount of interest in emulating my Pivoter parent. It was around this time that Barbon was brought home because I remember distinctly thinking how wrong everything was and how just the sight of "Barbie" in that leather jumpsuit and hard hat just made me want to puke and how no matter how they would dress the baby up I was going to find a way to fix things. I knew why the protective "shell", I heard all the "prone to injure self" talk, I understood that if Barbon was to be a part of the family and looked just like our

Pivoter, then I was definitely oddsie out, that much was becoming all too clear. So in my immature way of trying to fit in (*where I didn't belong*) off I went, putting on the hard hat, and I know this is gonna sound weird, but desperate times call for desperate measures, I cut a hole for my head, in a pair of leather pants, and pulled them on over my shirty to give myself a "leather-look, head-to-foot", just like the propammercials called for. Well I guess they got pretty upset with me that time cause that was when I was sent off to stay with the old folks, my grandparents.

Waxing

Now most other grandparents that I've heard about spend their time saying things like "New-z's will be Newsies" and letting their Full-z grandkids actually wash the dishes once in awhile and otherwise acting in ways that I would consider normal. But *my* grandparents practically bordered on neurotic when it came to what was expected of me, how I was to speak, walk, tie my shoes. Now I can't really say if this came natural to them or if this was supposed to be part of my integration, but one thing is for sure they were good at it. Only thing is, I was intent on being better at what I had to do.

It was while living with my grandparents in the village that I started school. Of course there were no schools in the village so I had to take a bus into town and right from the first day I came to realize it wasn't just Barbon or Rutga or my Pivoter or my Potter, and of course my old folks were too old for me to really notice anything. They just spent their days playing solitaire and their evenings watching old movies, even their clothes were similar, brown and gray. But that first day, as I boarded the bus into town and saw the driver, all dressed up in the frilly coat and leather boots, It was as if someone had turned the lights on, as I looked into those eyes as servile as I was afraid of becoming it was then that I realized. It was all about me. It had nothing to do with leather and makeup and it had *everything* to do with leather and makeup.

Climbing up the steps I was going to tell the driver my name and then I found out it was not news. I was greeted with "Welcome aboard Andi" and I stumbled back into a seat wondering if all bus drivers knew all their passengers names even before they rode with them. Soon enough I figured out that my grandparents weren't the only ones in on this deal of integrating me. No sooner had I settled in than the driver addressed me once more, this time in a sweet sing-song voice which, while disarming, had a certain edge to it that made you think you had better listen closely and obey. "Why don't you come sit in the seat behind me Andi. That way if someone needs something you'll be able to help better." I jumped to the front of the bus and promptly sat down behind the driver. While my first emotion was fear, I also felt sorry for the driver, I didn't know why, I just did. What's funny is that it didn't even occur to me that, maybe I wouldn't *want* to help anyone, it was one of the few times in my life that I can say I just went and did what was expected of me without questioning it.

Well that was about all the talking I remember the first day, or for that matter for the first few weeks, at least in my direction. Everyday I would just climb on board, climb in behind the driver and ride all the way to school without incident. While there was plenty of talking going on, no one had anything to say to me, a fact I accepted along with the "new kid on the block" territory, but then I noticed I wasn't alone in my conversational quarantine. There were three other kids, all seated near the front of the bus, who were quietly watching the others without saying a word. Their silence was enough to make me want to scream. I couldn't help but notice their clothes as well; it seemed all our parents either shopped at the same store or they all shared some excessive amount of bad taste genes. Given that all the other kids virtually ignored us up front, the trip to school was pretty much uneventful. Once we would get to school, however, it was something else entirely different.

First Half

What all along I had seen as a unique manifestation of my uniqueness wasn't so unique anymore. Where at home I felt I stuck out like a sore thumb, what with Rutga and our Potter, and Barbon and our Pivoter, here I was surrounded by our family, times a hundred. Over there, all metallic shine and sparkly, a whole gaggle of kids was very intent on whatever they were doing in the dirt, while on the opposite side of the schoolyard, clear over by the fence, there was a mass of brown, leather and corduroy (I could smell it) where Barbon's kindred spirits were gathered in some sort of painting ritual giving the fence, which didn't need it, a fresh coat of blue. I was in the middle of my reverie, half waiting for the alarm clock to wake me up, when I noticed I wasn't alone in my solitude. At least it appeared that this was the intention. They stood around singly and at a distance from each other and others. One was picking up the trash left on the field after the weekend. A couple of them were busy giving some little kids pushes on the swings. Another was fetching some paintbrushes for the painters while still another was carrying some tools for the dirt massagers. Here and there they were, helpers, and one and all dressed like me, hair cut like me and forever quiet, as I had been admonished to remain so many times by my parents, grand, and not so grand. I was finally starting to see the degree of my captivity and with that, my second illumination, came the germination of my liberation.

Full

Those few years spent at the school in town were filled with more insights, and more and more determination to get out of sight. If everyone else was willing to play their role and abide by the rules of this game, I couldn't help them but as for me, I wasn't going to be whatever everyone else wanted me to be. Try as they may. I understood that in order for a society to function and flourish it was necessary to maintain order and make sure certain things get done. It just didn't seem to make sense, to me at least, that the basis for determining who would do what and for whom was your birthday. I mean the phase of the moon at the time you actually managed to squeeze your way out into the world is so arbitrary, it's like deciding what job to do by whether you're male or female. It just doesn't connect. But I was also starting to realize that it was just me, or at least it sure felt like it. All the other kids seemed to *get it*.

Being a Halfsie, like it or not, I was slowly but surely being programmed into the Halfsie way of life. Be respectful. Be courteous. Be helpful. Be always ready to lend an ear (but never a word). Be tolerant, even if it meant denying yourself. Pierce your ears but never shave your legs, and never, never talk directly to anyone unless in response. On the surface these mostly sound like good rules to live by, the only problem was the manner in which they were integrated into your daily lessons like salt in water you don't notice the subtle change you're going through until it's too late and you don't even remember being any different. You go along with what is expected because no one else is complaining and you don't want to be the one to get the wrong kind of attention Squeaky wheel gets the grease, my foot. Little by little you begin to see things the way everyone else does. It begins to make sense, why there are no mentions of Halfsies in the history texts, why no great inventions were made by Halfsies. They were busy making the sandwiches for the real heroes I guess. Of course it was little exclamations like that that would get me in trouble. So quiet I remained, though inside I was scheming.

Last Half

While my time in school opened my eyes to the position Halfsies held in our society, it was life outside that showed me the place reserved for the other genders. Life at home with my grandparents didn't have much to offer in the way of new revelations, I did see enough there and in town to paint a picture of a world where I didn't belong. Fullsies and Newsies were obviously more fit to run things in

their respective spheres of society, as was pointed out repeatedly, whether on TV or in the books I had at home to read. The more I was shown the way things were, the more I secretly detested *things*.

I came to understand the deeper meanings behind why we called our parents Potters and Pivoters. I had heard how the birth under a full moon exerted such an influence on the infant that it gained a bond with the earth to the extent that planting, potting, growing and basically providing for the family coursed through the little Fullsie's veins. Likewise the New moon's influence on the birth of a Newsie was so weak that they needed to be protected from everything and anything that might harm them. Although the lack of illumination at birth apparently had turned on some internal light to the extent that Newsies intuitively knew what was going on, whether it was a good thing and what to do if it wasn't. In this way it seemed obvious to all who learned, and that included anyone and everyone, why Newsie, Pivoter parents controlled the "pivotal" sphere of the home, Fullsie, Potter parents controlled the Providential sphere of the work world, and all that was left was us, the Halfsies, servants to the world, never to marry, cause we couldn't *handle* either sphere of a family's existence, bound by society to enter into our sphere of servitude at the age of maturity. Born under an ambiguous influence better not left to its own design intentionally, with the best interests of all in mind, brought up into a most important role to be occupied in society.

Readily and willingly, having been appropriately *educated* we were to submit to our aestheticism, a small operation meant to help us in our endeavor to please society and gain our rightful place as the "top of the order" as our Cultural Creed had appointed us. There it was, engraved for eternity, Halfsies are the most important people in society, we were told in our Servitor class. Surely the Icon does not lie, there we were at the top. But the more I heard the less I liked of what this "small operation" meant for my life. The only problem was that as a Halfsie I had no say in the matter if I wanted to be accepted as a contributing member or any kind of member of society for that matter.

Waning

I hadn't quite reached my twelfth birthday when it was decided I should return to the city to be with my whole, immediate family when I went through the coming of age ritual. As much as I was looking forward to seeing my Potter and Pivoter, I was also dreading my approaching encounter with the knife which was bringing this all about. As I waited at the train station for my family I thought about all the letters I had received and all that had happened at home during my years at school. Rutga, of course, was well on the way to a successful, contributing life as a Fullsie ever on the lookout for the right Newsie, while Barbon was just finishing up primary. My parents had lost a child apparently, I never knew what it was, as nothing was mentioned after the birth. I figured it must have been stillborn or something as the due date had been around the end of the month, a few months back, and it was never even talked about at my grandparent's house. I thought it might have been kind of fun for Barbon if another Newsie had come along. Heavens forbid there should have been born another Halfsie. I think I would have died.

Well my family got there to pick me up and all the way to the house there was plenty of talking only none of it, as you could expect, was intended for me. Seems as if we were becoming the perfect little family, you know two parents and two point five kids, and I was the point five, in charge of washing dishes and mowing lawns and the like. I heard plenty of stuff but nothing to even suggest that there had almost been another child added to the household a little while ago. I supposed the pain still was too intense I sure wasn't going to ask as I knew what happened to little Halfsies when they ask too many questions, and it's no fun.

Once we were at home I settled into my new digs, literally, in the basement. Part of me was happy to get some privacy at long last but another part of me didn't feel so good about living subterranean. I wondered if I'd ever wake up to sunshine again. Nevertheless it was nice being around more people than two old folks day in and day out, even it was my own family who had shipped me off nine years earlier. While inside our home life was almost bearable, as I had learned what to say and do in order to fit in and not be ostracized so, playing my good little Halfsie role, I got to hang out with everyone else, if only in the shadows. Soon enough, however, the day I had been dreading arrived. I had been plenty catechized as to the procedure and its function in society. I was well aware of the ramifications if Halfsies were left alone and not helped in this way to remain on task. All this acculturation had done to me was ensure that I never let anyone into my deepest thoughts and desires. At this moment though, all seemed lost as my Potter and I headed to the temple for the removal of my procreative system *"in order to free me from the bondage of family so as to serve more fully the whole world."*

Re-New

Sitting in the front office I wondered how often this was performed. The way it was going it sure didn't seem like a smooth operation, if you know what I mean. The front office worker, a Halfsie of course, had left for lunch just as we got there, which meant we would have to wait an hour and a half just to get registered in order to proceed with the procedure. There was one other Halfsie in the front office waiting with great anticipation the *"moment of rebirth, the moment of bud removal to allow the fruition of life to take hold"*. While the two of us waited our Potters went outside to talk and share a coffee. I found out the other Halfsie's name was Les and actually lived quite near my family in the city. Like me Les had gone to live in a village and attend a school in a town quite far from the city. As we talked I started getting the feeling that the few choices I believed were actually mine weren't and that what that meant was that what little life I thought I had control over was simply an illusion. If I went through with this *all-important* ritual I wasn't simply taking my rightful place in society as had been intended since creation, I was handing over the keys to the last part of my life I owned, my body. It was at that moment I decided to take action.

While Les continued talking about all the wonderful things in store for us on the other side, I excused myself to go to the bathroom and went down the hall. I went right past the bathroom and finding the door marked **DO NOT ENTER** promptly went in. Having been trained on many computer systems at school it didn't take long to find what I was looking for. Confidential family records should have everything I need, I thought. Indeed it did, and more. It didn't take me longer than ten minutes to create a new record for myself, and a fine Fullsie was I going to be too. My next disclosure, however, took the edge off my elation. As I was checking my own family's records out I came across a record for the "birth" of a child. No name, just a birth date, the 26th, some other vital statistics, a date of "transfer" of the 29th, and in the Gender field it didn't have an 'F' or an 'H' or an 'N', it was marked 'T'. Now there was a mystery, and as I scanned some other family records I came across a few more similarly recorded births. All with a gender of 'T' and a Transfer date a few days after the birth date. Then I noticed something else peculiar, here and there I found a birth recorded as being Gendered 'Q'. At this point I was thoroughly confused, bewildered and completely beside myself. Then remembering what I was doing and what probably would happen to me if I were caught, I decided I better get going while the going was good.

Junky

Movie of the week playing on the curtains of
A junky gigolo ignoring the flashings of blues and reds
His vision obtained by the smile of a young kid in
A photograph playing on the dreams of soccer fields.
Once the admiration of many, has
Now become the skinny wasted dragon breathing disaster
Seen in front of the mirror each morning before
A needle is slipped in-between toes

The door falls with a plume of dust
Boot feet come stomping into the room
Shattering kicking holes into the walls, knocking
Pictures from resting places, scattering
Glass like the wishes of his daughters, left
In the cold under streetlights with
Signs of money lust stapled to their throats and
A number to call if the end is a gutter

A candle falls and curtains light up the
Darkness of the cinema room as the
Blues stomp about with guns and curses,
Oblivious of the zombie-man posing as a human on
A lazy boy leaking with the swelling smell of dope urine.
Paint from dirty walls drip and bubble,
Papers filled with junky imagination float as ash.
The blues flee with their vests and warrants

He waits in his chair breathing ash and smoke, without
Coughing or allowing his eyes to wet themselves, he
Posts his death on his face with a smile to let his
Daughters know they can come off their corners to
Rest his burnt corpse beside the dumpster he
Buried their mother in when her
Will to survive panicked under the needle and the
Young were forced to march the night

The smoke became him within the flames

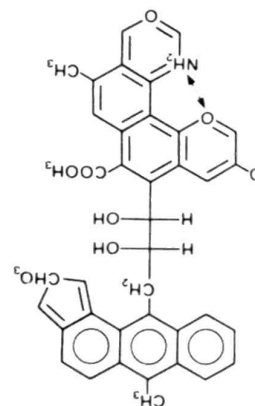
I live in a fantasy world
I live in a fantasy world
where my perception of
“normal” human
interaction is a
heroically restless,
tireless, heartbreakingly
honest pouring out of
soulful feelings. Where
most everyone is
willingly vulnerable
and people walk around
half drunken, or half
starry eyed, and void of
most fears, and there is
much singing, much of
the time. Where
beggars are the most
revered of choosers.
Where Happiness Runs.
To my chagrin, societal
“normalcy” is quite the
opposite and I end up
the half drunk weirdo,
whining to the stoic,
singing to the unmoved,
writing long
emotionally confusing
letters to old lovers in
some insane effort to
get someone to see it
my way. It’s selfish
really, and I realize that
I embody exactly the
things that I hate.

I Develop a Severe Chemical Imbalance

I am not heard from for nine months until one day I stagger into Boyd County Hospital in Kentucky with mysterious circular scars on my neck and a missing left pinky toe. I tell all the doctors and nurses gruesome stories of back-alley beatings and inescapable k-holes even though I really don't remember a thing. Television news crews crowd around my hospital bed as I recount how I traded my kidney to a black-market surgeon named Jeb for eight pounds of frozen ground beef and a half-empty bottle of Jagermeister. Then one night I tear off my hospital gown and run stark naked into the woods where I trip over an exposed pine root and dislocate my kneecap against a slab of granite. I scream and scream and scream, even after a young couple sinning just over the ridge uses their Nokia mobile to report a murder behind Boyd County Hospital. Eventually the cops show up and wrap me in a beige polyester blanket before shoving me in the back of a squad car. Sergeant Willis and Anderson drive me all the way to Ashland and admit me to Our Lady Bellefonte Hospital, a well-respected psychiatric facility, where I attempt to stick my tongue down the head nurse's throat because I like the way her everlasting breasts stretch the fabric of her white cotton uniform. I stay at Our Lady Bellefonte for a good month or two while the doctors try to figure out what the fuck my problem is, but I don't mind because I meet this girl Polly who thinks I'm Pierce Brosnan, and her and I have unprotected sex at least three times a day, and the food really isn't that bad, and the head nurse stops wearing a bra altogether, and I make friends with the custodian, Jerry, and he sneaks me swigs from his whiskey flask.

I Order China Quite Often

So what
if I get off popping bubble wrap?
Fuck,
it's not like
I hump vending machines.
Besides,
I bet you like popping bubble wrap.
I bet
you're imagining those
supple
air
pockets
right
now,
the way the plastic
melts around
your fingertips the instant
just
before the bump
pops,
and I bet you've got
goose bumps,
petite plastic bubble wrap
goose bumps
all over your body,
and
I bet
it's driving you mad.



on the Probable growth of trees.

She used to have beautiful ankles, but no more. Probably the work at the domu, it is one reason she often uses while endlessly massaging them. In the summer its heat when she's hot one arm crosses to cup the other's elbow. As she does standing fixed but afternoon hours increase along a black iron screen filtering back the outside world's beauty from her shoulders; flies and insects wander in with the sounds of traffic and walkers. Divisions of view, divisions of tasks a chance to serve the miso soup she says. Guests, who most never take time and learn why they eat, but there's nothing delicate about serving someone. It's rarely satisfying. Though it's probably just the article they've been reading or the reports they work on, after all it is just soup, what a silly thing to want recognition for. It must be the job, right.

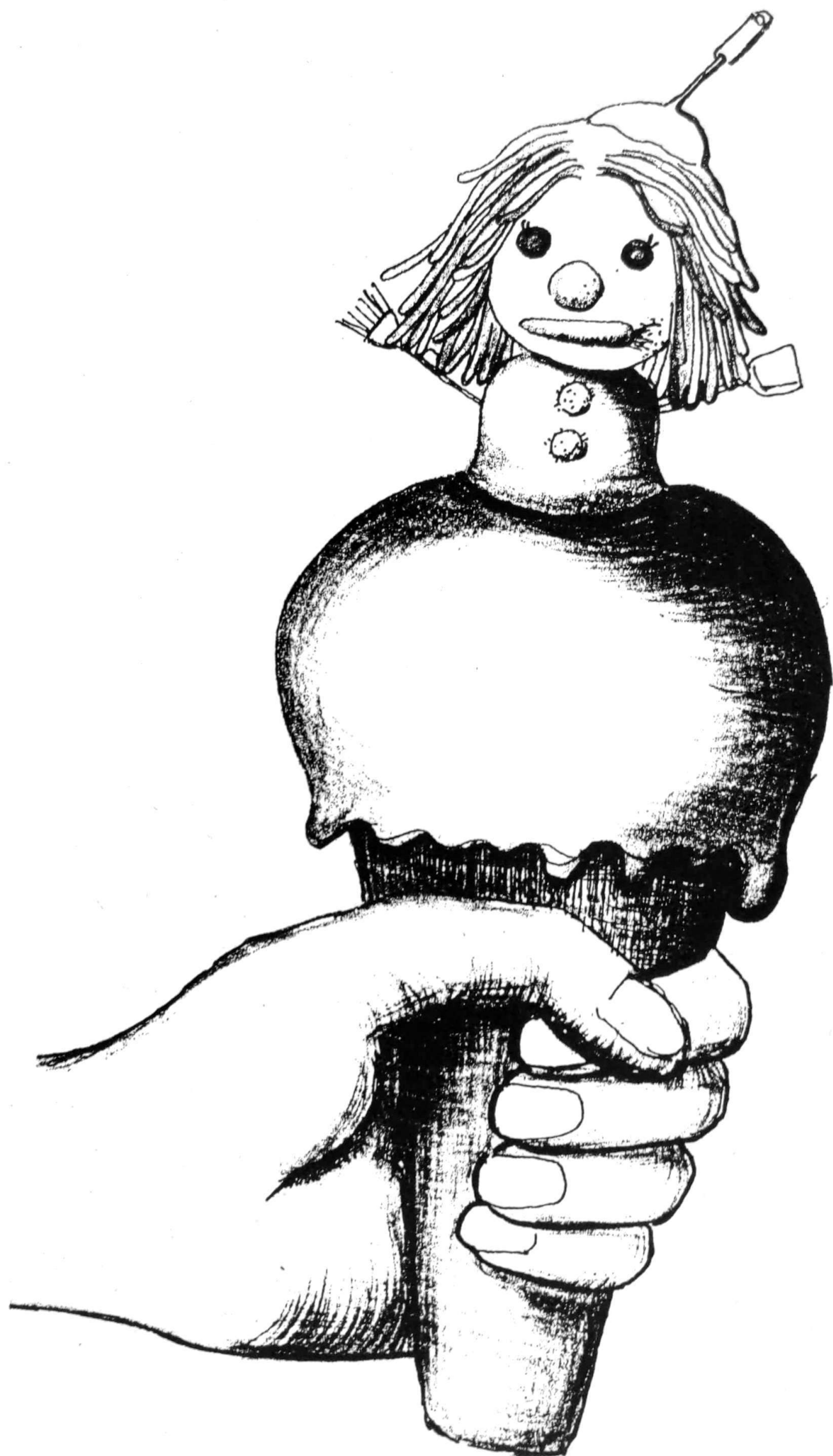
Then the dishwasher is supposed to be hotter, being a state regulation, to kill the bacteria. Even if she were given gloves the first four minutes would wrinkle the hands still suffering, to finish the first load from the owners, a family similar to every family. A meal together before opening each weekday; they eat after close but not every closing. She must wait for them. Reading what scraps of news the customers have left after her shift is done to clean their dishes then. Both meals' dishes cleaned before the shop opens that would require them to unlock the door earlier. An idea declined once already. One week invited and she sat and joined them. It was pleasing to share a meal even if conversation continued in Cantonese. She was sure their laughter was about her sometimes. She still wants so much. She had observed the effect of a few words long enough for them to be familiar, but admittedly she could have been wrong. The translation into Spanish isn't direct.

The disappointments take up less time now. When she found the cost of the meals deducted from her paycheck she began politely refusing the benevolences. An orange being just as satisfying as a pear, if the other was not in season. She doesn't want to be embarrassed at her job so she finds it odd when she is, still rubbing the ankles. It makes little sense to her that she would garner the approval of those people so lacking in hospitality. Each small mistake rants out like a bat in her head. Both thumbs trace a mixed film of disinfectant and stir fry oil on her palms. Restless bunched fingers tuck away in front pockets not dreaming as they should. Five years can change situations so much. It becomes harder to reconnect when all of those memories pool. The artificial neighborhood lake is called the holding tank, labeled by her and her friends, years ago. Living now three blocks away. The liquid looks thicker than water should. Strong algae over the top or down six inches or where it meets the algae rising from the basin, all of it ends up blurring in time. The water is a luscious black now, with fallen eyelashes of color, orange and purple, spots of white, too, resting on the surface. On her walk after work the air is never this cold, but this is much later and the park seems prettier. The trees and stops of grass subdue making interesting forms, against purple and red night sky. Walking an unwatched path before her, the night layers on itself like old desert cliffs. 'Oscar', his little form in blue pajamas being startled retreats beneath layers of blanket. She walks over toys to his bed arranging covers. He helps her arrange them. He tries his best to help, he'll never stop. Children have the awful habit of caring and not knowing why, a brilliant innocence. Sometimes she notices this time a smile and she lets him help. 'The sky is yellow and purple.' She nods it's true, 'Sí, the fog does that every winter.' There was no question but he wanted an answer. He looks out the window, she at him. They'll be this way a minute. Then she will say, 'Mother wants these eyes be sleeping.' 'Oscar still says no.' She bends closer beside his pillow careful not to rest her head and sleep, kissing her darling above the ear. 'Let them sleep. Let them sleep.'

The door is closed; it's quiet until he falls asleep then the blankets will sing lullabies he sways to. Little boys prepare trouble with quiet. Tidy up daughter; arrange things arranged the night before. Don't run the vacuum it's too loud, too old can't clean dirt up anyway. Her mother is still preparing for tomorrow as well. A traditional Mexican meal takes three days advance. Cubing the meat; prepare ingredients for the tamales, the corn husk the chili for tomorrow. How often do we young ones catch ourselves dreaming of tomorrow? Then the phone rings, timed like hiccups. Already hearing the greeting, she'd round the corner, looking for the

receiver on the wall. Lips sucked inside her mouth forced eyelids to part wide. Her back rolled against the wall, letting ankles exchange weight until desires hidden rumbling for a wayward journey rolled her off. The interviews lasted longest to her daughter's friends and when satisfied, 'For ju'. Mother asked just enough to learn what daughter would not share. Now daughter keep cleaning no more staring at the phone any longer. Mother is probably asleep by now anyway. She changes cloths. Washes her face and teeth and neck and hands. A bar of soap without scent but the water is hot and her gown is thin and she's fresh. She is still young but she thinks her breasts are heavy and wasted. She pulls back the three top sheets; I'll get the thicker blanket after Christmas after I can afford it. The tie in her hair is removed. Her hair has always been pony tailed. She hopes Oscar hasn't opened the closet to spy on his presents. Her mind begins to activate. She wants just to be tired and sleep, don't be awake now she coaxes. There is too much to do, she has to worry about the wreath. But it isn't to be helped. She feels that life has no more secrets to reveal, but doesn't know how to describe that so filled with the past. When other women's coaching on pregnancy were a bleak transmission. Alien definitions an outlook hastened to parallel. Compliant double-checking of assumption can harden the edges of exploration. She felt so undesirable to her baby for not feeling the same, for wanting still the life she had never yet experienced. How cruel to be so selfish to something so undeserving. Only later understood was what they least described: the want for that child. Sometimes an overpowering need to have that being in view. Oscar was four and starting preschool next fall, a year from now no more daycare from grandpa. She would graduate high school in the summer if she were still attending. There isn't enough for her; but it is no money and it is no time and it is no regret. All of these mothers agreeing on their role, but her removal is a lack to understand duty. So she tried to give up something she wasn't allowed something uncontrollable, to compensate. What she became, fed on doubt and shirked responsibility leaving what she was failed and returning each day apologetic, looking less for signs of pride. The movements of her body became functional not alluring, or graceful. Five years to reconcile the past with understanding. Is it unfair to tell her how unproductive it is? Understanding enough to face decisions with a calm. She has since come to see their testaments with more fondness. Their meanings deepen. Fewer calls to friends to visit the mall and waste the day without regret. How often do we older catch ourselves dreaming of yesterdays? Each of us trained how to let go of being a child: only a mother for your baby, a protector to your family, a model. It's what you've chosen it's what you do. Four years along and she is beginning to understand how to accept and forgetting to expect. Is it unfair to tell her? She stopped in the park to look at the iron bust, or some other dark metal. The head gazing forward looking for nothing at all, the moustache thick and attractive. He has every reason to be proud but his features speak too kindly. Before she left she spoke of missing last year, with the congregation lead by Mary, held above us, surrounded by flowers. Before her, a mute gold cross blinking selective reflections of candle and flashlight. The drummers next bumped and tapping out rhythm for twenty blocks. Walking as part of the congregation at one in the morning singing hymns for the dead. She had stopped twice at that sculpture. She was late to work looking at the bust of Oscar, reading the plaque not thinking of her boy named after his father. If you raise them right teach them respect will they know, or is it something hidden deep within them. Something that puberty brings out and indignation causes to remain. His mother named him Oscar. A mother's fault, no. But then she was back singing hymns again. Walking with her friends in a coat older than her, thick and able to wrap twice around her. Singing while the tambourines shook from all directions, the drums. With Mary in front. Leading the way. Laughing because of a look. Touting visible breaths high, as high above as possible. Joining the song, remising, while the tambourines shook somewhere in the crowd. Peripheral lights woke as they passed cold houses. It was wonderful. Arm in arm, drums and Mary leading the way while she singing with the crowd singing for the dead, to the cemetery. The cross of Jesus reflecting, then unseen up ahead. Reviving the celebrations of the past feeling endowed with the memories of community. It was wonderful. And she was happy, and careless. Alone but not distant. It was wonderful.

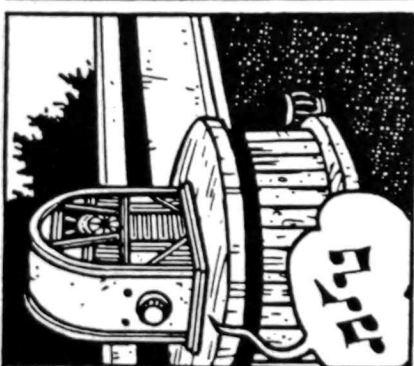
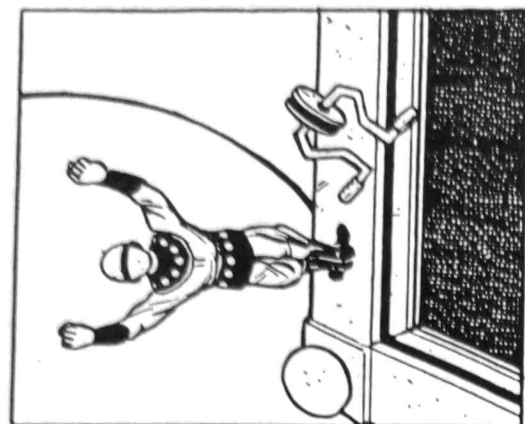
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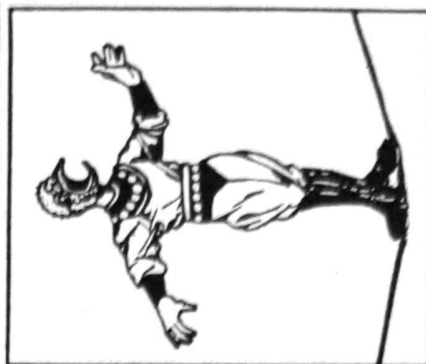


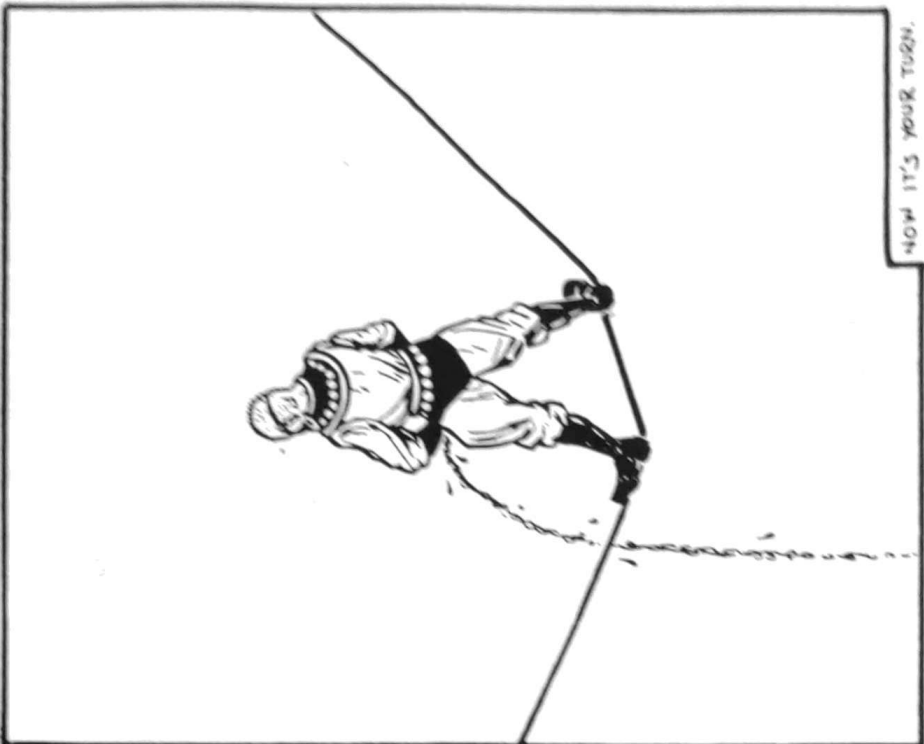


FOLLY.

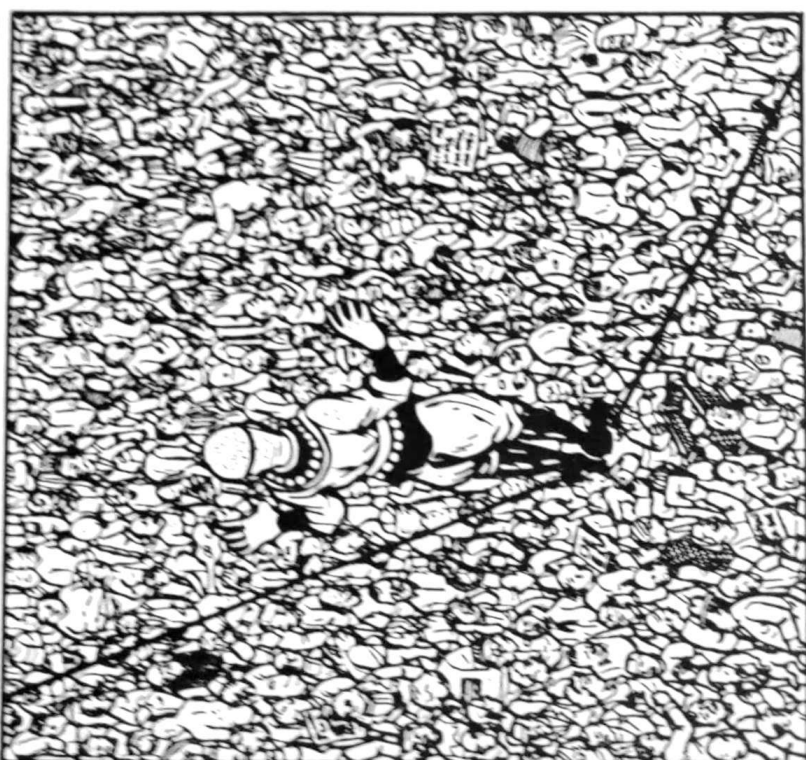
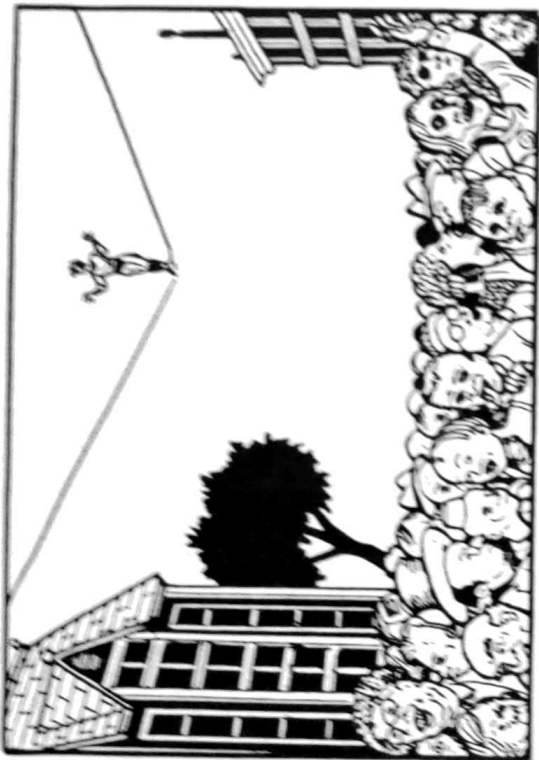








404 IT'S YOUR TURN.



DEAR ATTRACTIVE PERSON:

Please be aware that the young eligible single people in this house need some very Clear-cut Signals about whether or not you are attracted to them and if you would like to pursue social interactions along those lines (BLATANT FLIRTING PLEASE!). Any half-assed attempts at flirting will merely be interpreted as friendly banter and might not evoke the desired response. We're simply trying to "have fun" in the most efficient fashion around here, and probably not expecting that you would want to cuddle with us in any capacity, although I assure you that we would probably like nothing more than that very thing. Any attempts on your part to "spell it out" (a touch, a stare, a prolonged smile, a proposition involving any of those) would be greatly appreciated. We are a deliberately unaware and delightfully unassuming bunch, any given member of which, again, would probably jump at the opportunity for some good loving...especially from you...so...

Thank you for facilitating.



September Owl

it is dusk, and the buildings rise tall
like bones of creatures that lived long before us now.
street tunnels echo the gossip of snakes that never shed their skins
Listless Lampposts, Cables Dripping Silhouettes
cranes turn their claws up to feel for the rain.
I, I, I, I, I and millions of me
files lines throughout the city
carving concrete gorges
A fast infectious river.
Where are a young owl's eyes during the day?
The sleeping walk past his window like a parade.
At night when his mind escapes to where he needs to be
It's easier to survey a quiet scene.

It was Joe Halpertson's Supermarket, but the produce department was mine.

The year was 1987. The town was Fernley, Nevada. Trust me, there was once a Halpertson's there. I worked at night. I'd try to spend a little bit longer on the floors near the windows, so that I could look up at the stars. I used to clean them, the floors, and I cleaned them well. Only Halpertson's that didn't outsource for its custodial work. Thankfully, it was one of the smallest stores in the chain as well. I did so enjoy working alone at night. I used to stand in the middle of the produce area and close my eyes and imagine that I was in a jungle. The organic smells of the produce helped create that effect. When the tiny vapor producing sprinklers would come on, I imagined the sound was that of a snake hissing. It wasn't hissing at me directly, but just generally hissing, like snakes do. Probably to greet the dawn or something. Anyway. I used to gamble a lot. As you can imagine, there were a multitude of private poker games I could get in on, even just within the confines of that speck of a town Fernley. And Reno was an easy drive away. I gambled too much, really. And the stakes ended up being more than just my money. My greed cost me my life. Honestly, I really didn't have much else. It's funny how we tend to forget such things. Forget to appreciate the greatest thing that one can ever own (and for that matter...the ONLY thing that one can truly OWN...rich, poor, and in between)...our existence.

Working nights afforded me the opportunity to "host the morning", as it were, for my coworkers. They, fresh on the scene, would come to the store to find me, in whatever mood I decided to be in, greeting them in an according fashion. I would oftentimes be so excited to see them, on the outset of hours alone, that I would be excited and talkative. I'm glad that I was able to be that way. When you see someone briefly once a day, even though it's everyday, each daily interaction can prove to be as important to the relationship as the next... and the first.

One very crisp and clear November morning, I was greeted by the store manager, as usual, but with him was someone else. A very special someone else. Joe Halpertson. Apparently, he lived in Reno in the wintertime. Had a big nice house in the big nice house part of town. He looked like a normal guy. About six foot. Short sleeve button up shirt, couple pens in the pocket, underneath a brown suede jacket. Black slacks, large sized to accommodate his very round belly. Balding salt and pepper hair. Half smoked cigar affixed to his mouth like a pacifier. His laugh was audible from inside the store, even though he was in the middle of the parking lot. I had heard that he liked to gamble. I liked to gamble. We were destined to meet.

Rob, the manager appeared to be relating a very exciting story about some sort of activity, I was assuming by the way that his hands were animating moving objects moving towards each other, and then avoiding hitting one another. Perhaps Rob was telling a story about his youth. Driving a fast car, playing chicken with some other fast car driver. Perhaps he had recently seen some sort of trick jet airplane show. Whatever it was, it was funny, at least to Joe Halpertson. He laughed all the way up to the front door. It seemed like a genuine laugh. Perhaps Joe was one of these successful gambling businessmen that could

make anyone believe that he thought that they were funny and interesting because he could emulate genuine laughter at the drop of a hat. The type of person that would hold contempt for most of these same people when behind closed communiqué. Thinking this made me think it true. Made me immediately not trust this man, this ultimate boss of mine. This Joe Halpertson. Thankfully, I was fairly good at hiding my contempt as well.

“Hey-a Jon. Store’s looking good...”, said Rob.

“Thanks there Rob”

“Jon, I’d like to introduce you to Mr. Halpertson. Joe, this is Jon. He’s our nighttime cleanup crew.”

“Nice to meet you Mr. Halpertson....really nice, wow...”

“Nice to meet you Jon. And please, call me Joe. I only make my wife’s attorney call me Mr. Halpertson....”, guffawed Joe, choking back a muted chuckle.

Shit-eating grin, I tell ya.

“Sure Joe. Thanks. What brings you around to these parts? I thought Halpertson’s headquarters were in St. Louis?”

“Joe here’s just checking out the store. He’s in Reno for a while”, interjected Rob, almost in some sort of jealous protective way. Like the dialogue I was having with Joe was starting to become stagnant and embarrassing or something. That rat ass. I never really got the hang of that guy....

“Yeah, just making sure you guys are doing ok here at the store. Maybe get in a couple-a bets, if you know what I mean...” Joe said, nudge-nudging me and chuckling a bit.

“ahh, I see. I’m a cards man myself...I’d mark you as a...” I leaned back a bit and gave him the deliberately friendly once over, “ummm, craps!...you a dice man?”

“wow, that’s pretty good. I assume you noticed my jacket insignia,” Joe said as he lifted his big meaty hand and pointed to the emblem on the left breast of his jacket. I leaned in and saw that it was a pair of dice, one over the other, frozen in rolling motion, with the name “Joe” below them....he went on, “but, I have to admit that I am very much a poker man myself....there are just so many more options, ya know...”

“yeah, I know...”

I looked over at Rob and I could tell he just wanted to get on with the tour or whatever he seemed to be thinking about. He looked uncomfortable. Not relaxed. I almost felt sorry for him. Honestly, Rob was a pretty stand-up guy. Never really lied, always said what he meant, and often, wore his intentions on his sleeve. One can trust a guy like that. Unfortunately, I just couldn’t bring myself to like him.

“Well, nice to meet you Jon, good job around the store here...” Joe said as we shook hands.

“same to you Joe. Good luck with the cards...”

“thanks,” he said as he slowly starting walking away, being ushered by Rob.

He stopped after a couple of steps, and turned back towards me, "Hey Jon, whaddayasay about joining me and Rob here and some buddies of mine at my place in Reno tonight. A little wine, women and song...well, not really women. I find that women muddy up the purity of poker...well, you know...when they are there for ornamentation and such..." He started walking back towards me, and to the checkout counter, where he ripped off a piece of the receipt tape, grabbed a pen from his pocket, and proceeded to write something down.

"Sure, I'd love to." I said as he was writing, body slightly bent, breathing slightly labored... "thanks Joe"

"My pleasure Jon, see you tonight", he said as he handed me the piece of paper.

"see ya tonight." I said as he resumed following Rob.... "see ya tonight," I muttered under my breath as I looked at the piece of paper...

***PEPPERMILL, VIRGINIA ST.
SAFARI SUITE, 775 553 7808
20:00 sharp! \$100 BUY IN***

I was very excited. I didn't get invited to very many poker parties anymore. Most of my friends knew better. I was an unfriendly brooding poker player. I would antagonize. I was a sore loser. I would cheat whenever possible. I never brought my fair share of snacks (and, believe me, I ate plenty.) I kept thinking that I would have to be on my best behavior that night. I'd have to tell Rob that I would be in to clean tomorrow morning, instead of that coming night. I knew that he wouldn't mind. He was a little bitch when it came to playing poker as well, and I think we both realized and respected our commonalities in that realm. And on top of that, one night, about a year prior, Rob and I had played and guzzled drinks all over the Reno strip. We didn't really know each other all that well at the time, and were having quite a fun time together. Rob had just gotten married, and just been promoted to Manager at the Halpertson's. I had just been promoted (or demoted; depending on how you want to look at it) to my night shift clean up prince hood, and all was well in the world. Rob had kissed a few call girls during the course of the night, who were trying to roost, but nothing that his wife needed to know about. All did seem well, until, on our way home, far more drunken than we needed to be, in Rob's car, we hit something. We hit something that was alive before we hit it...and dead immediately following. We hit the mayor of Fernley's dog. He was an old dog, and stupid, and mangy and always roaming, but the mayor was very vocal about how much the dog meant to him, and probably held a grudge against whoever ran the old mutt over. Rob knew this and knew that I knew this and knew that I wouldn't tell and knew that my silence commanded a certain amount of tolerance for any evidence of reckless abandon on my part that may waft his way...from one after hour roustabout to another. Weak Men of Strong Honor adhering to an age-old gamblers' code. Rob and I owed each other things.

I arrived at the Peppermill early. It occurs to me now that I must have been anxious in some way, because I never arrived at engagements early unless I was anxious, or nervous, and, overall, just wanting to get things over with. Which was strange because I was actually somewhat excited and happy about the whole situation. Like picking a girl up for the first date when you know that she really likes you. My confidence level was high, my energy was up, I had a smile on my face that just stayed there, even when I wasn't thinking about it...and I was early. Maybe my subconscious was trying to tell me something. Maybe I was nervous a bit. I had no idea what sort of villains and card sharks Halpertson would invite to his poker table. What if I owed any of them money? What if Halpertson turned out to be a freak and everyone was naked and waiting to "initiate" me into something?

"Hello Sir and Welcome to the Peppermill! How may I help you today?!", said the young guy behind the Peppermill lobby counter, his timbre afire, his face adorned with blemishes.

"The Safari Suite?"

"Top Floor." He said as he pointed to the Elevators across the lobby. The lobby was very sparse, especially for a Friday evening. Almost suspiciously sparse. I remember entertaining the idea that all of the guests at the hotel had been invited to Halpertson's party. Not the case. When I arrived at the top floor, the doors opened to reveal a wall. The other side of the hallway. It was a wide hallway. About 30 feet wide, and maybe a hundred fifty feet long, with a door at each end of it's length. One door read "Safari", one read "Roman". (Instantly, the mind motors to imagine what sorts of décor lie in each room). In front of the Safari Suite Door, stood seven or so well dressed, fairly fit, anxious looking men. When I entered the hallway from the elevator, all of them stopped and looked at me. Some from the wall, to me. some from their feet, to me. They all looked back away as quickly as they had looked. They held an energy akin to children. Their feet a-shuffle. Not a thumb untwiddled. Like gnats or flies gathered in front of a doorway (in the course of a day, you'll find more people in doorways than anywhere else on the planet!), they bided their time. As I walked forward, one guy said to me, "You Halpertson?"

"Nah, he aint Halpertson." Said another guy. It seemed as though none of them knew each other and hadn't even gotten through the introduction part of getting to know each other.

Silence.

"Name's Jon." I stuck out my hand.

"Tony. Tony Harris." Volunteered the most vibrant looking guy of the bunch.

A silent handshake segueing into more silence. A silence suspiciously not unlike the first bit of silence.

"Nice to meet you Tony", I said with a smile. I was sincerely trying to make friends. I hadn't done that in a while, and, you know what...it felt good.

Again, Silence. Like we were in an Elevator. Like we were waiting for something...

“Ding” went the elevator, and out stepped the thing we were waiting for. A man like thing named Joe Halpertson. He had Rob with him again. So weird. Those two didn’t seem to be compatible at all. Maybe Rob was giving him good drugs. It’s easy to tolerate many many things when one is supplied with good drugs.

“...It was like he was a fuggin’ baseball coach doing the line-up, ya know...an ok show to start out with, a little better show, then a really good show....ya know, clean-up spot....HEY! LOOK AT THIS SAGGY BUNCH!!!” Joe had seen us. And looked happy to have done so.

“Halpertson!, what took you so long?! Damnit!” chuckled a really well groomed tall man in a nice black suit. He wasn’t upset, and in fact seemed really happy to see Halpertson. Every one was. It was like this guy Halpertson was the leader of the pack. Well respected. Father Figurine. The Robin Hood to our band of uncomfortably impatient thieves.

Halpertson pushed through our crowd to a choir of “Joe!”-s and “Old so and so”-s. He unlocked the door and we all poured into the room like various granules through the waist of an hourglass. I made eye contact with Rob as we shuffled in and he had a very large smile on his face. Surprisingly, he emitted a really warm friendly energy, and patted me on the shoulder on our way in.

“Hi-ya Jonny. Ready to lose your money?” I could tell that lots of drugs were involved in the formulation of those words.

“Ha ha, not so fast RobbyBobby. I’m feeling pretty lucky tonight. In fact you might as well give me your money right now. I’ll write a nice note to your wife, ya know, explaining that you went down fighting and crying out your undying love for her...”

“ha ha! We’ll see. And the wifey don’t need to know about anything, dig?”

“ha ha! I dig Rob. I dig. So, where have you and Joe been?”

“eh, I was just showing him around the town. We had lunch with Theresa. He showed me his gun collection. It’s in his bedroom over there. Fucking crazy. Tons of guns.” He tactfully motioned to the bedroom door to the right of the large array of windows lining the back wall of the living room that we were standing in. Everyone was still somewhat gathered in the general area in front of the door. And everyone was talking to each other! Weird. Introducing themselves to each other, laughing, shaking hands, exchanging business cards, asking questions. After all that hallway silence. Weird. I noticed that Halpertson was still talking to the tall man in the black suit. A hushed dialogue seemed to be transpiring between the two. As if secrets were being told. Halpertson even shot anxious darting glances around the room from time to time. Then, his eyes met mine. They stayed locked. He started the short walk over to where me and Rob were...

(to possibly be continued after a significant amount of your life has come and gone and another issue of our bedraggled be brave showers your fingertips with fairy dust)